

Blue Mound State Park Regional and Property Analysis



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**Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Bureau of Parks and Recreation – Division of Lands**

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PREFACE

In December, 2014 the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board authorized the Department to undertake a master plan amendment process for Blue Mound State Park. This amendment process is to review the summer and winter trail layouts and uses and develop a sustainable trails network plan for the park approved by the Board. Because of this limited review scope, this Regional and Property Analysis only takes in account the trail based information and ecological datasets. When a complete master plan update is undertaken, a new Regional and Property Analysis will be completed.

INTRODUCTION

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RPA IN THE MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

The purpose of the Regional and Property Analysis (RPA) is to provide baseline information on the park as well as information on how this property fits into or relates to its larger ecological and social context. The RPA serves as an important source of information for later steps in the master planning process (NR 44). The RPA is prepared during the first phase of the planning process as a stand-alone companion to this master plan amendment. The RPA is organized into four components: Introduction, Regional Assessment, Property Assessments, and Findings and Conclusions.

Regional Assessment

- Provides an overview of the current socio-economic, cultural, ecological, and recreational environments in the region and how those affect the physical and use aspects of the properties.
- Identifies significant ecological and recreational needs within the planning region.
- Defines existing and potential social demands or constraints that affect the property that should be considered during the planning process.

Property Assessments

- Provides an overview of the existing conditions on the property, including natural resources, recreational trail use and facilities, and adjacent land use.
- Describes how the existing conditions relate to management opportunities and needs.

Findings and Conclusions

- Uses the information from the regional and property assessments to draw conclusions about the property's niche, and serves as the basis for the plan amendment goals and objectives.

As mentioned above, this RPA will also focus on assessments, findings, and conclusions related to trail activity and development at Blue Mound State Park.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTIES AND REGION

Blue Mound State Park (BMSP)

Perched atop the highest point in southern Wisconsin, Blue Mound State Park offers spectacular views and unique geological features. Over 25 miles of scenic hiking, off-road biking and cross-country ski trails, as well as a family campground, access to the Military Ridge State Trail with bike-in campsites and a rustic cabin for people with disabilities make Blue Mound a popular year-round destination. A recently remodeled swimming pool facility is also available during the summer.

Current State ownership of BMSP encompasses a total of 1,159 acres. The property is bordered by private land with the Village of Blue Mounds directly to the south east. Brigham (Dane) County Park and other Dane County lands are situated just to the east.

Over 140,000 visitors / year enjoy the expansive vistas and recreation experiences the park has to offer.

Purpose of State Parks

State Parks are managed in accordance with Wis. Stat. s. 27.01 to provide areas for public recreation and for public education in conservation and nature study. An area may qualify as a state park by reason of its scenery, its plants and wildlife, or its historical, archaeological or geological interest.

Blue Mound State Park is a State Park as defined in Wis. Admin. Code s. NR 45.03(21) and is administered by the Bureau of Parks and Recreation.

ANALYSIS OF THE REGION

LAND USE AND TRENDS

BMSP straddles the border of Iowa and Dane counties in southcentral Wisconsin. The State Park sits directly northwest of the Village of Blue Mounds and 2.5 miles east of the Village of Barneveld. The closest major urban area is the City of Madison, approximately 20 miles to the east.

Land Use

In Iowa County, and the surrounding counties in the Southwest Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC) area, the dominant land use is agricultural at approximately 80%. In comparison, Dane County has 54% in agriculture. While containing the urban center of Madison, only 16% of Dane Counties' acreage is in existing development and infrastructure, contrasted with 23% covered by water, wetlands, and hydric soils. When looking at the southeast and southcentral regions as a whole, they have a higher proportion of agricultural land and a moderate proportion of developed property when compared to the state as a whole. Public conservation land is very low in the region compared to the state (4% in Dane county and 1% in Iowa county versus 17% statewide), resulting in limited access to outdoor recreational activities.

Population Centers

The City of Madison is the population center in the region and a large source of visitors to BMSP. The population for the City of Madison was 233,209 in 2010.

The surrounding counties of Columbia, Dane, Iowa, and Sauk where much of the remaining visitors come from had a combined population of 630,569 in 2010. These counties all experienced population growth, between 2000 and 2010, of approximately 13% combined between the four counties.

Transportation Networks

The population within a 30 mile radius places a relatively heavy demand on regional recreational properties. The

overall region is well supported by major highways and county roads. State / US Highway 18/151, within 1 mile south of BMSP, runs east/west from Madison and through Iowa County. State Highway 78 is a major north/south connector that crosses Hwy 18 just 4 miles to the east in Mount Horeb.

RECREATIONAL RESOURCES, USE, AND DEMAND

Wisconsinites are active participants in most forms of outdoor recreation and recreation participation rates within Wisconsin are higher than most other regions of the country. This high level of participation may be attributed to the combination of Wisconsin's abundant recreation resources as well as the state's four season climate, which provides recreational opportunities year-round.

The following sections describe the recreation demand in the region, supply of opportunities, and trends and issues for future use. Analysis of BMSP regional recreation is drawn from the 2005-2010 and 2011-2016 Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORP) and other sources. SCORP classifies and measures the preferences and needs of a statewide recreating public and is an invaluable tool in understanding the supply and demand of regional recreation. SCORP is updated every five years, informing and shaping recreational planning on state properties. SCORP divides the state into eight planning regions based on a collection of natural resources and tourism assets. BMSP is in Southern Gateways Region (SGR) of the SCORP (Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Richland, Rock, and Sauk counties).

Regional Demand

The 2011 SCORP notes that 87% of Wisconsin residents enjoy some form of outdoor recreation. Public lands within the Southern Gateway Region are a major draw for citizens from throughout southern Wisconsin. BMSP and other parks in the SGR are also popular with the adjacent states of Illinois, Iowa, and Minnesota.

The central presence of Madison impacts much of the Southern Gateways Region. Rapid suburban / exurban development within the greater Madison metropolitan area has made areas of Dane County among the fastest growing in the state. As urban populations increase, so too does the demand for traditionally urban-based recreation such as dog parks and developed sports facilities. These resources will continue to impact future recreation supply and demand.

Regional Supply

Publicly owned lands are important components of Wisconsin's recreational opportunities. The three primary public providers of recreation lands include: the federal government, state government, and local units of government (counties, cities, villages, and towns). The 2005 SCORP shows that state parks and wildlife areas are well distributed throughout the state, providing good public access. However, public lands tend to be concentrated in the northern and west central areas of the state.

From the rolling green hills of the southern parts of the region, to the centrally-located Wisconsin River, and the marshy areas of eastern portions, this region contains a variety of environments, the combination of which provide a wide array of recreational opportunities. The Southern Gateways also has a number of important geologic features. Devil's Lake State Park, a craggy glacial lake surrounded by high cliffs and scenic overlooks, is one of the most popular recreation areas in the region. The Baraboo Hills are also a spectacular geologic resource with many unique rock formations, cliffs, waterfalls, and a high diversity of plant and animal species.

Public Lands and Recreational Trail Supplies near Blue Mound State Park

BMSP is located within the Driftless Area that was untouched by the last glacial period. The resulting landscape of topographic relief provides a setting for public lands and associated recreation to provide a memorable visitor experience. An analysis of public lands and recreational opportunities within 30 miles was performed, and the following summarizes the information gathered.

State Parks, State Trails, and State Natural/Wildlife Areas

Ten State Parks (not including BMSP) and 5 State Trails are within 30 miles of BMSP. These parks are:

- Capital Springs
- Cross Plains
- Devil's Lake
- Gov. Dodge
- Gov. Nelson
- Lake Kegonsa
- Natural Bridge
- New Glarus Woods
- Tower Hill
- Yellowstone Lake

In total, the Parks provide trails with over 100 miles of hiking, 37 miles (60km) of groomed Nordic ski trails, 17 miles of bike trails, 22 miles of equestrian, and 22 miles of snowmobile trails.

State Trails are:

- Military Ridge
- Badger
- Capital City
- Sugar River
- Pecatonica

These trails total 131 miles. Of that total mileage, approximately 107 miles are used by snowmobile clubs in the winter along with 40 miles of winter ATV use on the Badger State Trail. Summer ATV use is allowed on 10 miles of the Pecatonica State Trail (*The Ice Age National Scenic Trail adds to the mileage of hiking trail on segments located at Devil's Lake SP to Merrimac, Lodi, Cross Plains, Verona, Belleville, Monticello, and Albany*).

In addition to State Parks and Trails, over 40 State Natural Areas and State Wildlife Areas provide varying levels of trail development for hiking, snowshoeing, and cross country skiing. The total mileage available has not been inventoried with the exception of 23 miles of hiking trails and 20 miles of equestrian trails at Lower Wisconsin River Waterway and 10 miles of equestrian at the Yellowstone Lake Wildlife Area.

County and Municipal Parks

There are numerous county and municipal parks located within the region. The vast majority of these public parks are managed by the Dane County Parks (DCP) and the Madison Parks Department.

DCP has 17 properties within 30 miles of BMSP; all but two properties have trail amenities for visitors. Their trail uses add up to 46 miles for hiking/walking, 20 miles (32km) of nordic trails, 4.5 miles of bike trails and 3 miles of cyclocross trails, 15 miles for equestrian riders, and 8 miles for snowmobiles.

The Madison Parks Department has over 260 parks in their system totaling over 5,500 acres of public land. Of all their parks - 24 have hiking/walking trails, 14 provide a snowshoeing experience, and 8 groom trails for Nordic Skiing.

Iowa and Sauk counties have parks and open space along with nearly every municipality west of Madison and throughout Iowa County.

ATV Trails

Opportunities for ATV users are very limited in southern Wisconsin when compared to the ATV access in the northern portion of the state. 57 miles of ATV trails are available in the region around BMSP; 47 miles along the Cheese Country Trail and 10 miles on the Pecatonica State Trail. An additional 40 miles are available in the winter when the Badger State Trail opens for ATV use.

Equestrian Specific Trail Networks

Besides the limited equestrian trail mentioned previously, both Iowa and Sauk Counties have facilities that have trails developed specifically for equestrian use. There are 50 miles of trails available at Big Valley Ranch in Iowa County and 45 miles between two facilities in Sauk County.

Mountain Bike Specific Trail Networks

Capital Off-Road Pathfinders (CORP) build and maintain mountain bike trails throughout Dane County. CORP works co-operatively with DCP and other municipalities where the trails are located. Between the 5 properties (one of which is a private club that has 5 miles) there are 13 miles of mountain bike trails within 30 miles of BMSP. No other mountain bike specific trail networks are present in the recreational analysis area.

Snowmobile Trails

When winter settles in and trails are groomed, there are over 1,500 miles of snowmobile trails in the SGR. 620 of those miles are in nearby Dane(500) and Tri-County(120 in Iowa-Green-Lafayette) areas.

Four primary snowmobile corridor routes are adjacent to BMSP:

- Corridor 38, travels east-west following the Military Ridge Trail along the southern boundary of BMSP. This corridor travels from Dodgeville through Verona and routes south of Madison then connects to Waukesha.
- Corridor 36, also orientated east-west, is approximately 10 miles to the north of BMSP. This connects Richland Center through Mazomanie and north of Sun Prairie to north of Milwaukee.
- Corridor 23, running north-south to intersections with Corridors 36 and 38, is accessed via Corridor 38 approximately 7 miles to the west of BMSP. Corridor 23 starts just west of Wisconsin Rapids, travels adjacent to Mauston through Reedsburg and Spring Green, then passes west of Blue Mound as it heads towards Blanchardville and on to Illinois.
- Corridor 21, similarly connects Corridors 36 and 38 on a north-south alignment, approximately 6 miles to the east. This very long corridor starts north of Wausau, heads past Wisconsin Rapids to the east, then travels through Wisconsin Dells and nearby Sauk City, it then travels further south just beyond New Glarus.

REGIONAL RECREATIONAL ISSUES, NEEDS AND TRENDS

Understanding the supply and demand of recreational resources is an important component of planning for recreational opportunities. If there is a demonstrated shortage of a particular resource, it is important to know what the future demand for that resource will be. The Wisconsin DNR conducted a series of town meetings across the state in 2005. These meetings collected over 1,400 responses about citizen's perceptions of recreation issues and barriers to recreation. The 2005 SCORP details recreational issues mentioned by respondents from the Southern Gateway Region:

- Budget constraints on park and recreation programs
- Increased competition for natural resources
- Increasing ATV usage and associated impacts
- Increasing multiple-use recreation conflicts
- Lack of maintenance on parks and recreation areas
- Lack of park and recreation staff
- Overcrowding
- Poor water quality impairing recreation

- Protecting silent sport areas

These results show the need for well-maintained public lands and park facilities in the region which allow diverse recreational activities while providing an exceptional user experience with minimal conflicts between incompatible uses.

Another way to understand this demand is by gauging user perceptions of a particular recreation amenity. The 2005 SCORP also assessed visitor perceptions of their top recreation needs. For the Southern Gateways Region, these needs include:

- More ATV usage opportunities
- More biking trails
- More camping opportunities
- More canoeing opportunities
- More cross-country skiing opportunities
- More hiking and horse trails

Looking forward, a number of recreation activities will continue to increase in popularity. Using changes in participations rates, industry forecasts and opinions from recreation professionals, the 2011-16 SCORP projected trends for a limited set of Wisconsin outdoor recreation activities. For trails based activities, the following are projected:

Increasing Demand

- Adventure racing
- Triathlon (on and off road)

Stable Demand

- Walk for pleasure
- Trail running
- Day hiking
- Snowshoeing
- Bicycling (road and non-paved)

Decreasing demand

- Inline skating
- Horseback riding on trails

REGIONAL ECOLOGICAL SETTING

Blue Mound State Park is located in the Southwest Savanna and Western Coulees & Ridges Ecological Landscapes.

The Southwest Savanna Landscape is underlain by sedimentary bedrock, especially dolomites and sandstones. The Southwest Savanna is part of Wisconsin's Driftless Area, a region that has not been glaciated for at least the last 2.4 million years. The topography is characterized by broad, open ridgetops, deep valleys, and steep, wooded slopes. Soils on hilltops are mostly silt loams. In some areas soils are shallow, with bedrock or stony red clay subsoil very close to or at the surface. In other locales the ridgetops have a deep cap of loess-derived silt loam (these are the most productive agricultural soils). Valley soils include alluvial sands, loams, and occasionally, peats.

The Western Coulee and Ridges Ecological Landscape in southwestern and west central Wisconsin are characterized by its lack of glacial features. It is part of the region called the "Driftless Area" because it lacks glacial deposits known as "drift" (although glacial outwash materials do occur in river valleys). The topography is unique in the state due to the long periods of erosion which have created dissected ridges, steep-sided valleys, and extensive stream networks with dendritic drainage patterns. The Western Coulee and Ridges is more forested than the rest of southern Wisconsin. Soils are mostly silt loams (loess) and sandy loams, over dolomite and sandstone bedrock. Several large rivers flow through or border the ecological landscape.

ANALYSIS OF THE PROPERTY

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

As mentioned previously, BMSP lays within the Driftless Area where the topography is a series of rolling hills and mounds. Blue Mound is central to the park with the high point of the mound being at 1,719 feet above sea level (FASL). As the mound falls away along all 360 degrees of solar aspect, the lowest elevations can be found to the north at approximately 1,180 FASL. The Military Ridge State Trail, along the southern border of BMSP, nearly follows the 1,340 contour elevations.

A vast network of ephemeral, intermittent, and perennial drainages are present throughout BMSP. The existing hydrology and the local soil characteristics impact recreational trail use in the spring due to the prolonged time it takes for trails to dry out before they are open to the public.

VEGETATION AND NATURAL COMMUNITIES

Historic Vegetation

Based on Finley's (1976) historical land cover map, almost all of Blue Mound State Park was covered by oaks: white, black, and bur. A very small area, about 2 acres, in the far southeast corner of the park was covered in prairie.

Current Vegetation and Natural Communities

Blue Mound State Park has areas of good quality southern dry-mesic and mesic forest interspersed with lower quality forests on former fields and other openings. The better quality forests are dominated by red oak and sugar maple along with white oak, basswood, ash, and other species. The ground flora is diverse with a robust display of spring ephemeral flowers. There is also a small remnant prairie and formerly open oak woodlands that are succeeding to closed canopy forest.

Invasive species, especially garlic mustard, non-native bush honeysuckle, common buckthorn, and multiflora rose, are largely absent from some areas but are common to dominant in others.

Table 1: 2014 Blue Mound State Park Vegetation Coverage

Type	Acres	%
Oak	742	65%
Northern hardwoods	178	16%
Prairie / open	121	10%
Aspen	62	5%
Central hardwoods	21	< 2%
White Pine	17	< 2%
Developed	13	< 2%
Walnut	5	< 1%

ENDANGERED, THREATENED AND SPECIAL CONCERN SPECIES

Past and ongoing biotic surveys have documented sixteen rare species, two good quality natural communities, and two other special features. Ten of the rare species are animals (birds, mammals, and an invertebrate) of which eight are listed as state threatened and two as special concern. One of the animals is also federally listed. At least one of the bird populations is significant at a statewide level.

Three of the rare plants are listed as state endangered, and three are special concern. One of the plants is also federally listed as threatened. Five of the six plant species are considered to be historical records.

EXISTING RECREATIONAL TRAIL FACILITIES AND USE

Overall, there are approximately 26.4 miles of recreation based trails at BMSP. When broken down by seasonal use; 22.8 miles are open during the summer months (see Map A), while 23.7 trail miles are available in the winter (see Map B). Beyond the 26.4 miles of open trails, 2.4 miles are closed to public use because of unsustainable alignments, un-approved construction, and recently opened re-routes.

Multiple uses share many segments of trails throughout BMSP, e.g., a bike trail also is open for walking. The following details the trails by use:

- 22.8 miles available for walking
- 6.6 miles of walking only
- 16.2 miles of bike trail
- 13.0 miles of mountain bike single-track
- 7.5 miles (11.7 km) of groomed classic cross country Ski trail
- 1.7 miles of (1.0 km) of groomed skate skiing trail
- 15.4 miles of snowshoe/ungroomed cross country ski trail
- 13.4 miles of trail where winter biking is allowed

Trail Classifications

Trails within State Park properties are also classified based on features such as tread surfaces, width, accessibility, etc. These classifications are based upon state administrative rule NR 44 and are shown on Map C.

Type 1 - Primitive trail. A primitive trail shall be a minimally developed single-file trail with a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 8 feet and a minimal tread width for the intended use, and have a rough, ungraded bed where large rocks, stumps, and downed logs may be present. It primarily follows the natural topography, has no or few shallow cuts and fills, and is surfaced with primitive or native materials, except for limited distances where environmental conditions require the use of other materials. Modifications to the natural trail surface are limited to that which is minimally necessary to provide essential environmental protection.

Type 2 - Lightly developed trail. A lightly developed trail shall be a trail with a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 16 feet, a moderately wide tread width for the designated uses, a rough-graded base to remove stumps and large rocks, and a surface of primitive or native materials, except where other materials are required due to environmental conditions or where the trail also serves as a lightly developed road where other types of surfacing materials are used.

Type 3 - Moderately developed trail. A moderately developed trail shall be a trail with a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 8 feet, a minimal tread width for the intended use, a relatively smooth graded base with a compacted surface composed of stable materials such as aggregate. Where practicable and feasible, a moderately developed trail shall, at a minimum, meet the standards for recreational trails accessible to persons with a disability.

Type 4 - Fully developed trail. A fully developed trail shall be a trail with a smoothly graded base and a stable, hard surface composed of materials such as asphalt, aggregate, or frozen earth. The trails cleared width, tread width, and cuts and fills are not limited, but shall be appropriate for the trail's intended use. To the degree practicable and feasible, fully developed pedestrian trails shall be fully accessible by persons with physical disabilities.

Blue Mound State Park has all four trail classifications which are shown on Map C and listed in Table 2,

Table 2: Blue Mound State Park Trail Classifications and Mileages

Trail Classification	Mileage
Type 1 - Primitive	14.9
Type 2 – Lightly Developed	7.0
Type 3 – Moderately Developed	0.6
Type 2 – Fully Developed	0.5

EXISTING ROADS

An existing road network exists within the park for year-round visitor access. Similar to trails, roads are also classified based on features such as surfaces, width, accessibility, etc.

Type 1- Primitive road. A primitive road shall be a temporary or permanent seasonal road with a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 12 feet, little or no roadbed grading, minimal cut and fill, a surface of primitive or native material.

Type 2 - Lightly developed road. A lightly developed road shall be a temporary road, a permanent seasonal road or a permanent all-season road which is primarily a single lane with a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 16 feet, is lightly to well-graded with minimal cut and fill, is surfaced with primitive, native or aggregate materials except in limited special use situations where asphalt may be used, and has a maximum speed design of 15 mph.

Type 3 - Moderately developed road. A moderately developed road shall be a permanent seasonal road or a permanent all-season road which typically is 2-lane, but may be one-lane, have a maximum sustained cleared width normally not exceeding 45 feet for 2-lane and 30 feet for one-lane, a well-graded roadbed and may have moderate cuts and fills and shallow ditching, has a surface of aggregate, asphalt or native material, and a maximum design speed of 25 mph.

Type 4 - Fully developed road. A fully developed road shall be a permanent all-season road with a cleared width normally of 50 feet or more, a roadbed with cuts and fills as needed, an aggregate, asphalt or other paved surface and be designed for speeds exceeding 25 mph.

Blue Mound State Park has two road classifications which are shown on Map C and listed in Table 3,

Table 3: Blue Mound State Park Road Classifications and Mileages

Trail Classification	Mileage
Type 1 - Primitive	0.0
Type 2 – Lightly Developed	0.4
Type 3 – Moderately Developed	0.0
Type 2 – Fully Developed	4.5

VISITOR ESTIMATION AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

On average, Blue Mound State Park receives over 140,000 visitors a year. For day trips, local visitors make up the majority of users, but for overnight camping, non-local visitors are the majority. This split is not unusual for the park that is close to an urban area.

In 2013, the total economic impact from this visitation was \$10,824,860 with a larger portion of this impact coming from non-local visitors. This larger non-local value is driven mostly from camping expenditures.

CULTURAL/ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

There are no *recorded* archeological sites within the Park. There are two historic structures – the 1930's open air shelter and the foundation of the former WIBA radio tower building.

SUMMARY

Blue Mound State Park offers a unique recreation niche. It is a state park that provides a connection to an urban population for a number of recreation opportunities. The trails at BMSP are an important connection between public health, wellness and outdoor recreation. These trails match the other recreation amenities that offer a full state park experience. As the urban population continues to expand within the region, the state park will continue to be a popular destination.

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